

January 26, 2021

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Youth Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition." Our coalition comprises of multiple youths led organizations from the county level like MCR (Montgomery County Regional Council) to statewide organizations like Maryland Youth for Change. We strongly encourage you to pass a clean bill to protect vulnerable children and communities from a poison that takes 7,500 lives in Maryland each year and is actively hooking an entirely new generation of kids.

In 6th grade, I met one of my closest friends in school, Jacob. We would use to do all of our assignments together and go over to each other's houses almost every week. All of this changed when during the summer, Jacob started to JUUL. He was drawn in by all the different flavors like mango, his favorite fruit, and other flavored products. At first, I was drawn in as well as the flavors made it seem like candy and sounded so appealing. However, then my Mom informed me that one of my relatives has been using e-cigarettes and other drugs have passed away. Even though I wasn't close to them, I was devastated and immediately informed Jacob to stop vaping. However, he ignored my advice stating that he got everything under control and he wasn't ever planning to use other drugs. I then saw the horrors as I realized my best friend had fallen to big tobacco.

Summer passed and I started 7th grade when I noticed how bad Jacob had gotten. He used to be a straight-A student who never missed a single day of school but it all changed as he started to vape. He would skip class even when we had a test to go to the bathroom and vape with his "friends." He would starve during lunch and use his lunch money to buy pods instead of eating. I confronted him multiple times about his addiction and every time he would get more and more hostile and accuse me of being intrusive. Every time I confronted him, I could feel our friendship slipping away as he started to not respond to my texts and hang out more with his "vape friends." I was heartbroken as the Jacob I used to play video games and knew everything about was now gone. I saw another Jacob would get detention almost every week for skipping class and starving to have "one more hit". Jacob used to prioritize academics over everything and wanted to be a professor when he grew up. However, when we had to talk to PARCC for two hours, he couldn't finish the test. I remember seeing him in front of me with shaky hands and he couldn't concentrate on the test for longer than 2 minutes. He was jittery and shaky and couldn't focus at all. When the two hours were up, he didn't finish most of the sections. The school contacted his parents after that and that's when they discovered his habit and took away his Juul. His parents unenrolled him from our school and took all forms of communication away from him.

Jacob's story is only one of the many kids that I know whose lives have been destroyed due to flavored tobacco. Many of my friends and peers vape and are destroying their futures every time they take a hit. It pains to think about Jacob, a kid with a bright future, losing everything due to Tobacco. I plead to you not to let any more kids with bright futures get ruined by flavored tobacco in Maryland anymore. Don't let another 12 or 13 years old have to experience losing their best friend and see them go down a downwards spiral. I urge all of you all to think about Jacob and many other kids just like him and support the passage of a clean SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition."

Respectfully Submitted,

Daniel Suh
Maryland Youth Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition

All names have been changed for privacy concerns.